"Hitler’s ‘prophecy’ first announced in 1939 that in the event of another war the Jews would be destroyed became a key metaphor for the ‘Final Solution’ and, fundamentally, served to indicate how in this crucial area the presumed ‘wish of the Führer’ activated this most terrible of the regime’s crimes.” Ian Kershaw

"Ultimately, the Holocaust took place because at the most basic level individual human beings killed other human beings in large numbers over an extended period of time. The grass-roots perpetrators became ‘professional killers.” Christopher Browning

"Germans’ anti-Semitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent of the Holocaust. They were the central causal agent not only of Hitler’s decision to annihilate European Jewry but also of the perpetrators’ willingness to kill and brutalize Jews.” Daniel Jonah Goldhagen

"What kind of men were these who accepted murder as their daily work? They were perfectly ordinary people, with one difference: they could act as members of the ‘master race’. They decided whether a person lived or died, they had power." Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, & Volker Riess

"Historians should rightly be wary of treating the complexities of human motivation reductively and finding one single explanation for events so monstrously beyond human comprehension. However, to argue that organizational culture [of the SS] and the ideology underpinning it provided the environment that facilitated annihilation is not to paint the world…in simplistic terms. Instead it is to recognize that the impetus for genocide came from within an organization that established and promoted its own values, beliefs, and standards for behavior...." Edward Westermann

The Course

Among the most troubling and perplexing issues raised by the Holocaust is how and why persons, many of whom in other circumstances might well have lived ordinary lives, became participants in the mass murder of a defenseless people. Our course addresses this subject by examining a range of perpetrators (and the contexts within which they functioned) from those at the highest levels of power in Nazi Germany (Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler), to those who ran the death camps (Franz Stangl), to the many who carried out the bureaucratic tasks necessary for the system of killing to function (Adolf Eichmann), and to the largely unknown thousands who composed the killing squads. The reading and discussion of selected documents and Christopher Browning’s classic study, Ordinary Men, will help us engage this issue. In this moment when we try to make sense of those who commit acts of terror against innocent persons, I especially welcome the opportunity join you in wrestling with this troubling topic.

Reading: I have listed the Harper Perennial paperback edition of Ordinary Men in the course catalog as the preferred edition (ISBN: 0069995068, or ISBN-13: 978-0069995065). However, if you have a different edition, that is not a problem. I have listed our assignments by chapter which should remain the same for all editions.

Objectives: 1) Class members will acquire a fuller understanding of the Nazi policies and actions that defined the Holocaust and perpetrators who implemented them.
2) Through the careful study of selected documents and Ordinary Men, class members will gain deeper insight into the actions and motivations of perpetrators.
3) Class members will become familiar with some of the major debates among scholars regarding perpetrator behavior and motivation.
Class Schedule:

January 24       Introductions, Contexts, & the Leading Perpetrator

The German Context, Adolf Hitler, National Socialism
An Overview of German Anti-Jewish Policy, 1933-1945
Assessing Hitler as the Leading Perpetrator

**Required Reading:** Brief extracts from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*; Selected National Socialist documents.

January 31       The Schutzstaffel (SS) and the Holocaust

The Rise of the SS and its Organizational Features
Assessing Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, and Adolf Eichmann as Notable Perpetrators
Mass Murder through Shooting: The *Einsatzgruppen* and Police Battalions

**Required Reading:** Selected Documents; Browning, *Ordinary Men*, Preface & Chapters 1-4, Chapter 5, last 4 pages pp. 45-48.

**Discussion Questions on Ordinary Men:** What primary source material enables Browning to write this book? What are the strengths and weakness of this material? What other challenges does Browning face in writing about this topic? The first chapter is less than two pages. Is it effective? Why or why not? How would you characterize the Order Police? What roles did it play in the Final Solution? What is your response to this material? What were the basic characteristics of Reserve Police Battalion 101?

February 7       Continuing Discussion of *Ordinary Men* and Debates over Perpetrator Motivation.

Assessing Franz Stangl as a Perpetrator
Were Only Males Perpetrators?
Key Issues Raised by *Ordinary Men*
Daniel Goldhagen’s Response to *Ordinary Men*
The Broader Debate over Perpetrator Motivation
Concluding Reflections

**Required Reading:** Selected Documents, Browning, Chapters 7-9, 11, 13-18; Goldhagen, Handout.

**Discussion Questions on Ordinary Men:** What were the central features of the Józefów action and what impacts did it have on the men of Battalion 101? As these men experienced subsequent killing actions did their behaviors change? How did they process their participation in mass shootings? How did they cope? How did those who chose not to shoot explain their actions; how were they regarded by their fellow unit members? What was the role and significance of “Jew hunts”? The last major killing action in the Lublin district was called “Harvest Festival.” What does that label reveal about the perpetrators? In Chapter 17 Browning addresses additional challenges the historian faces in working with judicial records? What are those challenges and do they undermine Browning’s central narrative and conclusions? What is your assessment of Browning’s analysis of the motivations of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101? Do you agree with his concluding sentence? (“If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot.”) How does Daniel Goldhagen interpret the motivation of the perpetrators? Does he agree with Browning?